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GRAMMATICAL EXEGESIS.

This is not a taking title. It would be hard to choose two words so suggestive to most persons of dry and technical learning, or more likely to incline the majority to skip the present article. But the readers of THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT are not the majority. However many, they are still the few—the few who have caught a glimpse of far heights of truth, and fain would climb. Among them are young Christian men, and women too, who mean to make the Bible a life-long study, who are already convinced that the noblest quest in which the human intellect can engage is the quest of truth, above all, that truth concerning Christ and his kingdom which the Bible was designed to communicate.

I write particularly for those who have acquired sufficient knowledge of the Greek language to explore for themselves the original text of the New Testament, and who desire to know somewhat of the methods and results of Biblical science. Let me urge the importance of a right beginning, and offer some plain elementary suggestions and directions. In no kind of study is it more important to acquire a right method, or to form at the outset an intelligent conception of one's task.

It is unnecessary for my present purpose to present a comprehensive definition of exegesis; it is sufficient to say that it is studying the Bible on scientific principles. Bible study in order to be exegesis must be methodical and scientific.

Exegesis requires *method*. It implies a defined aim, a plan and order of procedure. Most persons study without any definite aim, and without an established method or a persistent purpose. Their studies inevitably become desultory, and lead, if not into positive error, at least to no large and permanent results. They learn many things, but acquire no coherent, organic body of knowledge. They ramble in the fields of sacred knowledge, but have scarcely a conception what it is to climb upward from height to height, till vast and glorious landscapes open to view, and the grander prospects and truths of revelation take possession of the soul with power.

Exegesis is the *scientific* method. We must have not only method, but the right method, in order to facilitate progress

as well as to secure correct results. One may spend years in collecting learned opinions on difficult texts, and yet know nothing of exegesis. By the aid of well-chosen books one may illustrate and apply Scripture truth with considerable skill, but this is not exegesis. It cannot be too often reiterated that the answer to the question, How to study the Bible, is a scientific answer. It must regard established principles of interpretation. It is by the grasp of principles that "knowledge grows from more to more," and the mind achieves its conquests of truth. In pressing forward either to discover new or to verify old truth, if you are to keep a steady aim and a sure footing, it must be by a practical mastery of the principles regulative of the subject in hand. There is a Biblical science, and in this, as in all other science, the first problem is that of method.

All real and effective Bible study begins with grammatical exegesis, that part of exegesis with which the present article is especially concerned. Grammatical exegesis, if we may draw a line between this first stage in the process of Biblical interpretation, and those which follow it, deals with the single sentence. It takes one sentence at a time, and applies the laws of thought and language in order to understand it. It aims immediately and principally at a translation. The student makes it his object to construct for himself an intelligible English equivalent. He seeks to ascertain the writer's thought as determined from the meanings of the words, and from their relation to one another in the given sentence, and then to express it in the most perfect possible translation or paraphrase.

The following four simple rules will aid the beginner in grammatical exegesis.

1. *View the sentence as a whole, and determine provisionally its general structure.* This is the first step. It is frequently supposed that the first step to be taken in interpretation is the investigation of the etymology and meaning of single words. But the fact is, we assume some knowledge of the words of the language, to begin with, and the one object on which the student's attention is primarily to be fixed is a sentence, not a term, however important in the discourse that term may be. For a term cannot express a thought; it cannot convey to the mind a truth; it merely refers to an object, or a class of

objects. The study of terms is the study of language, whereas our main object in exegesis is to understand the ideas, intention, and individuality of a particular writer. It is not ordinarily in single terms that we find the coinage of the author's mind—these are already made to his hand—but in the clauses and propositions into which he frames them. Now it is an important matter in the interpretation of discourse not to lose sight of our proper aim, and overlook the thing said while dwelling upon the peculiar form or meaning of some one word used in saying it. The unit of observation is a sentence, a single complete thought; our object is to obtain a sharply defined and vivid impression of that thought. In a printed or punctuated book the reader is ordinarily saved the trouble of deciding provisionally where a sentence ends. But he will frequently come upon passages, such as James 4: 5, or the opening verses of Mark's gospel, where it is plain that he must not depend upon the printed text for his interpretation. A clear analysis of the sentence should be made as soon as possible. Is it simple, or complex, or compound? What is its predicate? Is it complete, or left broken, unfinished? What are its principal members? Correct analysis of sentences is equally important for good thinking, good reading, or good exegesis. Hence the value of Green's *Analysis of the English Language*, a book which treats of this subject in an exact and thoroughly logical manner. The later editions have been enlarged by the insertion of valuable matter, and the mechanical formulas for practice in analysis have been much more fully elaborated than in the earlier; but the early editions are still preferable for many students, presenting, as they do, the gist of the subject in simple outline.

2. *Ascertain the signification of terms.* Although not the first, this is one of the most important things in exegetical study. A beginner will be wise to spend much time upon the more important words. For two years now students have had the invaluable help of Thayer's *Lexicon of New Testament Greek*; as a thesaurus of accurate information concerning the New Testament vocabulary there is no work in any language to equal it. Liddell and Scott is not to be laid aside; Stephens's Thesaurus may often be consulted with advantage; but for the most part, special lexicons will be required, such as Thayer, or Robinson. The latter, though practically

superseded by Thayer, will often be helpful in tabulating the meanings of a widely ramified word. For the investigation of synonyms Trench is the only important available book for the English student. Above all, use a concordance constantly. "If I could only have two books," one has said, "they should be God's Bible and Cruden's Concordance." The thorough use of a concordance will almost of itself make a Biblical scholar. Bruder's *Concordantiæ* is indispensable for the most rapid and effective work with the Greek text. Hudson's *Critical Greek and English Concordance* is small and handy. The *Englishman's Greek Concordance*, published by Bagster (the American edition, I am informed, is just now out of print), and Young's *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, will each be found serviceable in comparing passages, and are preferred by many students who have but slight familiarity with Greek. Cremer (*Biblico-theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*) treats of the more important abstract and theological terms. In historical and archæological matters recourse may be had to Bible dictionaries and encyclopædias, such as Smith (*Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Hackett), Kitto (*Encyclopædia*, edited by Alexander), and the Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopædia*.

The classical student need not be reminded that to define a word means far more than to furnish certain English equivalents. At the same time, he is not to suppose that the exegesis of a given passage includes the exhaustive historical study of each important word occurring in it. Exegesis is to be distinguished from lexicography; the latter is a branch of special knowledge, and is auxiliary to the former. Still, it is in this very auxiliary task that the student needs to expend much labor. Let him prepare full "word-studies" on the leading terms in each passage; in no way can he so rapidly deepen and enlarge his biblical knowledge.

3. *Scrutinize the word-forms, and determine with the utmost possible precision the relation of the words or parts of the sentence to one another.* Some general conclusions as to the syntax of the sentence have already been arrived at under No. 1 above; a trained classical scholar will often detect its frame-work at a glance. But that general conclusion is now to be verified, and the various qualifying elements and factors of the thought analyzed and defined. First-rate work in this stage of the

process requires thorough grammatical training and wide knowledge of the Greek language—a language not only copious in its vocabulary, but richly provided with the flexional elements of speech. No other language affords such scope for the scientific interpreter. Its highly differentiated flexional elements are not for the purpose of mere vocal variety, but in order to express the manifoldness of thought; it is by the study of these relational elements that one may come into possession of the fulness and variety of a writer's meaning, and discern the true force and individuality of a given discourse or passage.

In the preceding step the student's hand-books are lexicon and concordance; in this it is the grammar. For New Testament work special grammars are necessary, in addition to Goodwin, or Hadley-Allen. The best are those of Buttmann, Winer, and S. G. Green. In classifying the uses of the Greek verb in the New Testament, and comparing its proper English equivalents the student will find nothing so helpful as Professor Burton's *Outline of Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, (privately printed, Newton Centre, Mass., 1888). For those who begin their study of the Greek language with the New Testament, Professor Weidner's *Introductory New Testament Greek Method*, (New York, 1888) is to be recommended.

4. *Finally, determine and put into appropriate English the whole thought.* Every student of language understands how difficult, or rather impossible, is the task of making a perfect translation, especially from an ancient language; it is at once the ideal and the despair of the scholar. Good translating of the Bible requires not only taste, scholarship, and even genius, but love, enthusiasm, and toil. It was because William Tyndale had these, and gave these to his task, that we have our noble English version—still substantially Tyndale's version, notwithstanding change and revision down to the recent revision of 1881. Luther kept improving the version he gave to Germany till the day of his death. These were public versions. But every thorough student will have his own version, at least of particular passages to which he has devoted special study; he will do his own translating if he does his own thinking. *Write* the translation, having first decided in your own mind all questions of arrangement and

punctuation. Sometimes, in the case of a peculiarly difficult clause you may prefer to paraphrase, rather than simply to translate. A paraphrase is, as Dryden said, "a translation with latitude," in which the author's words are not so strictly followed as his sense. Generally, however, it is preferable to reserve the making of a paraphrase until the passage has been studied as a whole, in its larger logical relations and its subject-matter.

Write this translation *for yourself*, or for a special audience of your own, choosing the terms that most nearly express the thought as you conceive it; your object is to interpret the author in terms of your own, not another's, thought. Professor Noyes, in the preface of his admirable translation of the New Testament (Boston 1868) said: "Every word of it is the result of my own judgment, guided by universally acknowledged principles of scientific interpretation, without regard to creed or church." Archdeacon Farrar (Life and Work of St. Paul) explains his rendering of the Pauline epistles, in which he often paraphrases somewhat freely, as follows: "I have constantly deviated from the English version. Of the merits of that version, its incomparable force and melody, it would be impossible to speak with too much reverence, and it only requires the removal of errors which were inevitable to the age in which it was executed, to make it as nearly perfect as any work of man can be. But our very familiarity with it is often a barrier to our due understanding of many passages; for 'words' it has been truly said, 'do ossify the very organs of intelligence.' My object in translating without reference to the honored phrases of our English Bible has expressly been, not only to correct where correction was required, but also to brighten the edge of expressions which time has dulled, and to reproduce as closely as possible, the exact force and form of the original, even in those roughnesses, turns of expression, and unfinished clauses, which are rightly modified in versions intended for public reading."

Comparison with other translations will develop the critical faculty and stimulate to perfection. Both the Authorized and the Revised versions will, of course, be in constant use. The latter has now become indispensable to the general reader as a correction and an exposition of the former; the student will soon find himself revising the Revision, sometimes its

English style, or its punctuation, sometimes, in more important matters of interpretation. The American Bible Union version (New York, 1866) was designed to be a revision, not an independent translation; the (third) rule adopted was: "The exact meaning of the inspired text, as that text expressed it to those who understood the original Scriptures at the time they were first written, must be given in corresponding words and phrases, so far as they can be found in the English language, with the least possible obscurity or indefiniteness." Among private, independent translations perhaps no one surpasses that of Professor Noyes in accuracy, clearness, and merit of style; the basis of it was the Greek text of Tischendorf, and for the larger portion the seventh edition. Tischendorf's eighth edition has been translated by Dr. Samuel Davidson, (London, 1876). The German scholar may compare with Luther's version the recent authorized revision, known as the *Protebibel*, 1883; also the Zürich version, and that of DeWette; there is also a recent translation of the New Testament by Weiszäcker in a handy edition, printed in paragraphs, with several typographical devices to aid the reader (third and fourth corrected edition, Freiburg, 1888). In French, besides the versions circulated by the Bible societies, that of Reuss (incorporated into his commentary) may be recommended, also that of Arnaud (Paris, 1865), and Oltramare (Geneva, 1872).

The object of grammatical exegesis, as I have defined it above, is now attained—when you have completed a translation of each sentence in the given passage. It will be at the best but an approximately perfect rendering, not a full and exact English equivalent. You will be more and more conscious of this in the degree that Paul or any Scripture writer becomes personal to you, so that you catch the tone and living power of his words. It is not my purpose here to discuss principles and theories of translation on which much has been written, chiefly in connection with two books, the Bible and Homer. The student will find it profitable to read the prefaces, or the descriptions, of some of the more famous translations of the Bible, or of the New Testament, named above. Dr. Thomas Arnold gave some suggestions that deserve reading, on the analogy required by the age and character of the author to be translated; they are to be found in the appendix to his *Lectures on Modern History*.

The foregoing discussion will have but slight interest to those who look upon such minute and prolonged labor as disproportionate to its object. The Bible is not so difficult a book as it is thought, the task of understanding it is not so great as to require from the unprofessional scholar the laborious methods of exegesis. Such objectors may have excellent practical aims, but have evidently formed no clear conception of the science of Christian theology; they do not understand the mighty intellectual movement which, during the last half century has been laying anew the foundations of the Christian faith by subjecting its documentary sources to an exhaustive scientific research. It is a mistake fraught with serious intellectual and spiritual consequences to imagine the Bible, or indeed any single book of it, easy of comprehension. It is a book written by men of a different race from ourselves, in a foreign language, and in a distant age; a book which expounds on broad lines the historic process of redemption, which came slowly to completion through a period of sixteen centuries, which enshrines the profoundest experiences and the loftiest conceptions known to the soul of man. No Christian scholar can afford to leave it altogether to others, least of all can the church leave it to unbelievers, to scrutinize, test and verify the documentary bases of faith. Will you know this book for yourself and ground your own faith in intelligent conviction? In shaping your religious and ethical conceptions will you give the preference to human dicta and systems, or cut deep channels for your thought on Biblical lines, and aim from the beginning at the acquisition of a verified and vitalized body of Christian truth? In an age like our own of doubt and questioning and shifting opinion, confronting new intellectual problems and new spiritual tasks, are you determined to stand on the rock of personally acquired truth, and in your teaching of others to be able to say, "We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen?" It is this result for which exegesis is to prepare the way, it is this aim which justifies its methods. The obstacles in its path are many and great. One of these is imaginary knowledge. Our very familiarity with the Bible breeds a self-satisfied ignorance. Most men are contented with "the form of knowledge and of truth," without possessing its power. It is the few who have the courage and the perseverance to

reject hearsays, break the bondage of traditionalism, and draw the master-truths of life directly from the Bible.

One caution must not be omitted. The grammatical process outlined above does not embrace the whole of interpretation. Grammatical exegesis is only the first stage of the exegetical task—the gateway into the temple of biblical science. Yet all who will really know the Bible must humbly and obediently enter that gateway. Frederick the Great criticizing the unfortunate military policy of his royal antagonist, Joseph the Second, of Austria, remarked that he had the fatal habit of taking the second step before he had taken the first. In study no habit is more common, and none more fatal to the highest achievement. Buttmann has taken Melancthon's well-known dictum as the motto of his *Grammar of New Testament Greek*: *Scripturam non posse intelligi theologicæ, nisi antea sit intellectum grammaticæ*, "It is impossible to understand Scripture in its theology without having first understood its grammar." It was this conviction that laid deep the foundations of the Reformation theology, and that produced those enduring monuments of consecrated scholarship, genius, and toil, Tyndale's English version Luther's German version, and Calvin's Commentaries. We read that the exegetical club at Wittenberg, which held its meetings in the study of Luther or of Melancthon, sometimes spent several days on a single word. Luther spoke from his own experience, when he wrote concerning the epistle to the Romans: "It can never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."

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